

The many efforts to protect and enhance the Spokane River

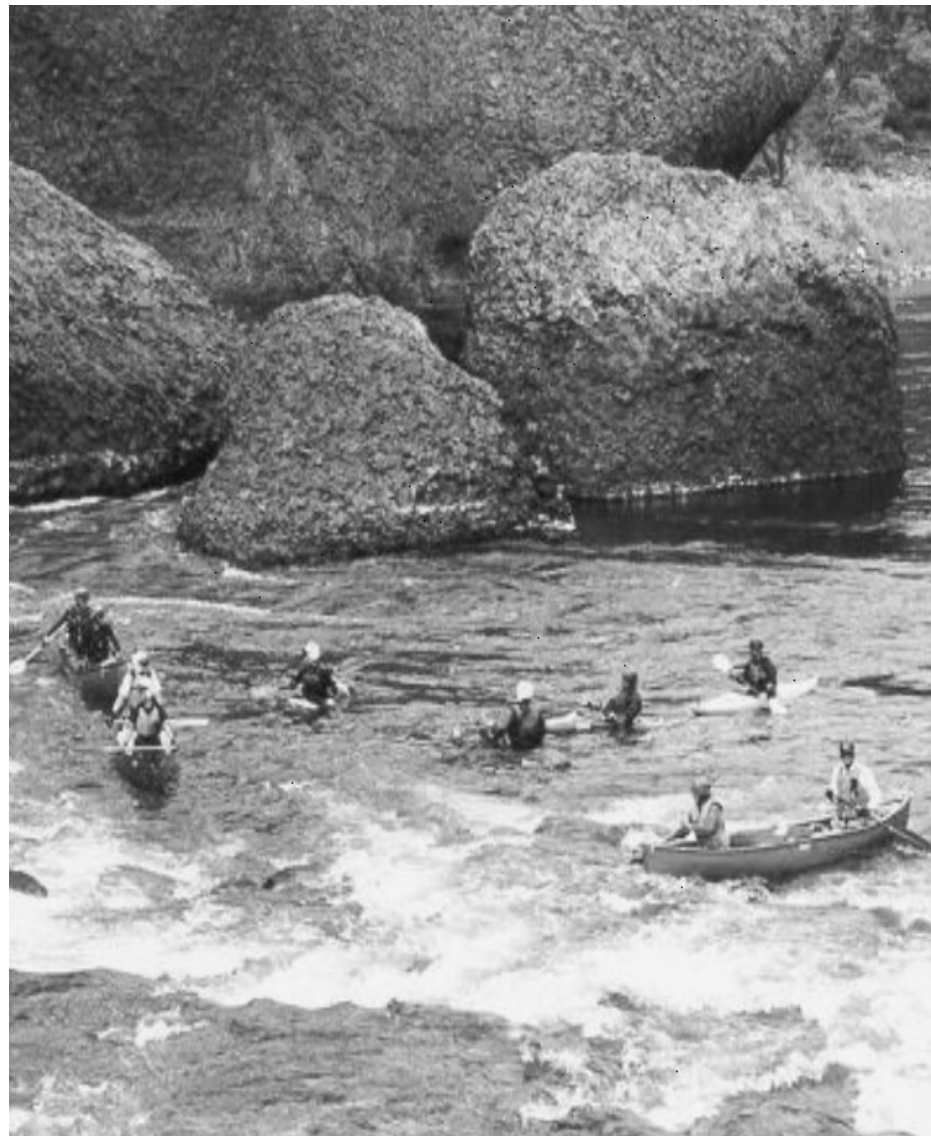
So much is taking place on the Spokane River that it can be confusing, even for those doing the work! Most of these activities overlap significantly.

For example, conclusions reached during the cleanup plan "TMDL" process may carry over into the FERC relicensing process. The cleanup plans are directly related to the fish advisories put into effect by the Washington Department of Health and Spokane Regional Health District. And the cleanup in the Coeur d'Alene basin directly affects pollution in the Spokane River, the process of writing a cleanup plan in Washington, and the issuance of the fish consumption advisories!

The assessment of water quantity during the Middle/Little Spokane River watershed planning process will contain vital information for those who have and will be studying the Spokane Valley/Rathdrum Prairie aquifer.

This publication is meant to briefly describe each of these activities, where they take place on the river and outline the timeframe in which they will occur.

If you want additional information, contact names and relevant Web sites are provided on the back.



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Coeur d'Alene basin cleanup

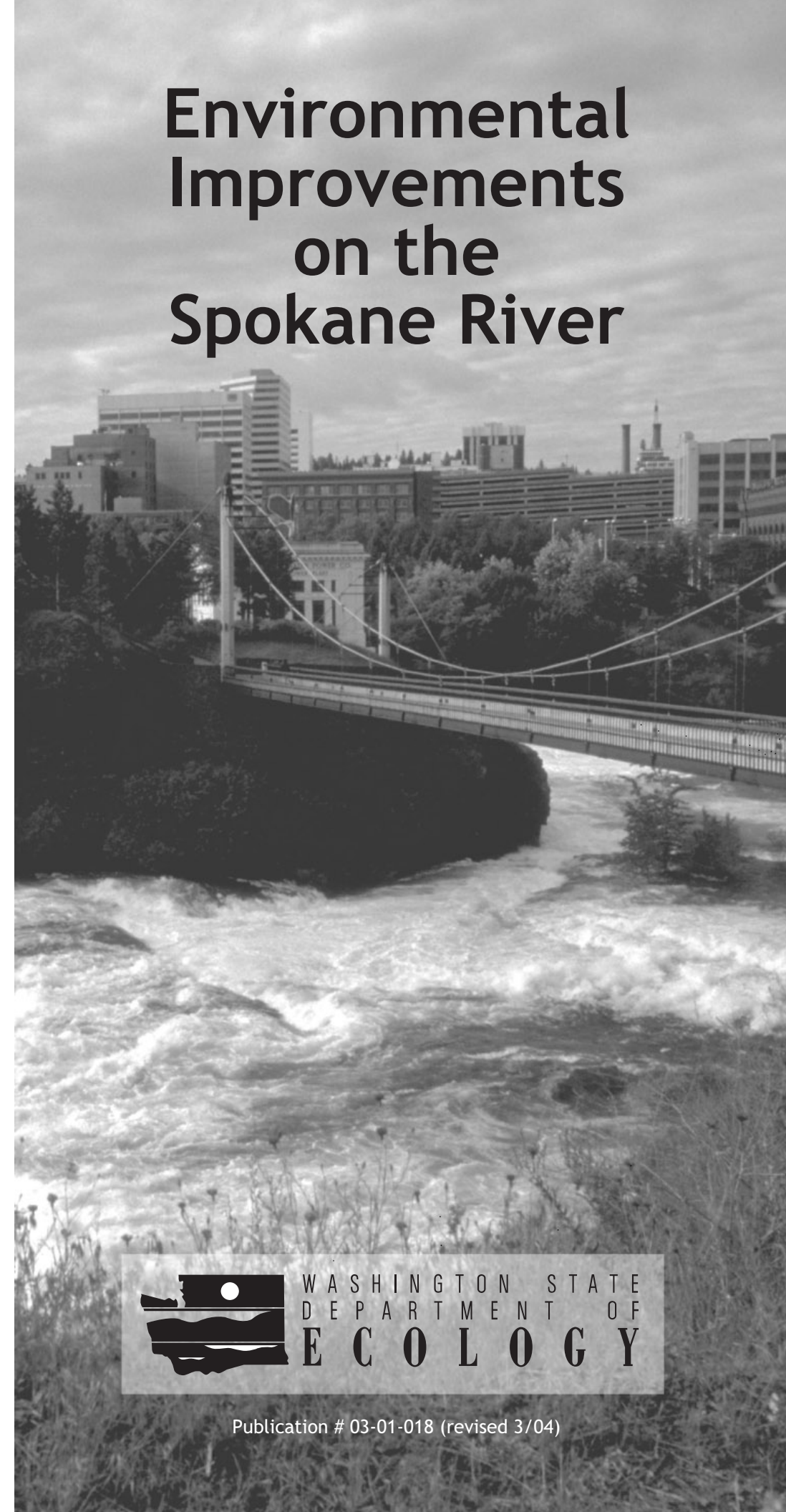
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Environmental Improvements on the Spokane River



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Watershed planning

Local governments and organizations in the Spokane River area have formed watershed-planning units to confront the problem of water supply. In 1998 the Washington Legislature approved HB 2514, the Watershed Planning Act. The Legislature has provided money each year to help local governments and organizations:

- ☛ form their planning units (*phase I*),
- ☛ pay for the studies needed to determine the amount of water currently available (*phase II*), and
- ☛ develop a plan (*phase III*).

The plan may include establishing more water-storage facilities, creating strategies to conserve water, and identifying ways to ensure the flows in rivers and streams are maintained at a level that sustains a healthy environment for fish.

Both the Middle/Little Spokane and the Hangman/Latah Creek planning units are conducting Phase III of the planning process. The Middle/Little Spokane plan and the Hangman/Latah Creek plan will be available for public review later in 2004. A new planning unit has been formed for the Lower Spokane River watershed, which starts where Latah Creek enters the Spokane River and extends to the north and west.

Meanwhile, the state Legislature passed a bill during the 2003 session that authorizes a fourth phase of planning - the “implementation phase” - and financial assistance to go along with it.

Water quality cleanup plans

The Spokane River is listed as impaired for several different pollutants. Ecology is in the process of preparing or has already prepared a cleanup plan or “total maximum daily load” (TMDL) report for each of these parameters:

- ☛ *Biological oxygen demand (BOD)* – to ensure enough dissolved oxygen is available for fish in Lake Spokane – TMDL due in late 2004.
- ☛ *Phosphorus* – Excess nutrients from a variety of point sources and polluted runoff fertilizes algae and other plants that harm recreational uses in Lake Spokane – TMDL was completed in 1992 but is being revisited as part of the BOD TMDL.
- ☛ *Dissolved metals* – Primarily from historic mining practices in Idaho. Assumes water quality standards are being met at the border of Idaho and Washington – Completed in 1999.

☛ *PCBs* – From several point sources that historically used PCBs in their operations. The PCBs are found in the water, in aquatic life, and have come to rest in some sediments, particularly behind Upriver Dam – Began in 2003. Water-quality cleanup plans are in the early stages on the tributaries of the Spokane River.

Fish consumption advisories

The Washington state Department of Health and the Spokane Regional Health District issued a fish consumption advisory in June, 2000 because of lead contamination in whole-body fish from historic mining practices in Idaho. The advisory warned that people who eat meals made from whole fish, especially children and pregnant women, are at greater risk than people who eat only fish fillets. In March 2001, that health advisory was revised to recommend that people avoid or strictly limit their consumption of fish caught in the river above Upriver Dam because of PCBs found in fish tissue. The need for fish consumption advisories will likely change as water quality improvements are made.

Cleaning up PCBs

Ecology is investigating polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in sediments at the Upriver Dam on the Spokane River from approximately rivermile 80 at the Upriver Dam to rivermile 85 upstream of the dam near the Centennial Trail footbridge. Ecology, Avista Development, Inc. and Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation are working together to investigate and come up with options for cleaning up the PCBs.

FERC relicensing

Non-federal hydroelectric facilities on most rivers and streams in the U.S. are under the jurisdiction of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). It is FERC's responsibility to issue licenses for these facilities and determine license conditions for periods of 30 to 50 years. These licenses are written to ensure that the dam is operated safely and that environmental harm is minimized.

Twenty-two dams in Washington state have FERC licenses due to expire between now and 2010 and are subject to a re-licensing process. The Avista Corporation owns six of the seven hydroelectric dams along the Spokane River. Five of Avista's dams are to be relicensed.

Section 401 of the federal Clean Water Act requires a state water quality certification when a federal agency licenses or permits an activity, like a hydroelectric project, that involves a discharge to the nation's waters. Ecology's water quality section will be responsible to review/condition/approve the “401 certification” part of the license to protect water quality. The application for relicensing the Spokane River Avista dams must be submitted by July 31, 2005.

Spokane Valley/ Rathdrum Prairie aquifer study

The SVRP aquifer serves as a sole source aquifer for close to 500,000 people in the Spokane-Coeur d'Alene vicinity.

A broad group of governmental agencies and interest groups in Idaho and Washington have joined together to conduct a bi-state comprehensive study of the Spokane Valley/ Rathdrum Prairie aquifer (SVRP). These organizations realized in 2002 that someday soon conflict could arise about how the two states allocate water from the Spokane River. But in order to come to agreement on a management plan that both states could agree on, more information was needed about how the aquifer works.

The two states and the U.S. Geological Survey have received \$500,000 to begin the study and are seeking a total of \$3 million more to complete the study over the next several years. The scientific study will include how much water is in the aquifer, how much the aquifer is recharged by the Spokane River, and, conversely, how much aquifer water is lost to the Spokane River. It also will include social and economic factors useful in planning for the future.

Coeur d’Alene basin cleanup

The influence of mining waste from Idaho's Silver Valley has extended well into Washington down the Spokane River to Lake Roosevelt. The EPA has completed for the Coeur d'Alene Basin a “Record of Decision” or plan for cleanup that contains strategies for the Spokane River. For Washington, this will include primarily the cleanup of “hot spots” associated with recreational sites and important aquatic habitats along shoreline areas, as well as behind Upriver Dam where sediments containing metals tend to accumulate. Efforts in Idaho will hopefully reduce the metals that enter Lake Coeur d'Alene and in turn the Spokane River. Washington has a seat on the Basin Environmental Improvement Act Commission to represent Washington's interests as the multi-year cleanup progresses.

Shoreline master program updates

Spokane County and the cities of Spokane, Millwood, and the newly incorporated city of Spokane Valley have initiated a joint effort to update the Spokane County Shoreline Master Program. The Spokane County Conservation District is helping with an inventory of the county's stream and lake shorelines. Under the Shoreline Management Act, counties and cities are required to develop plans to protect the shorelines of lakes and streams, while providing for public access and appropriate development in shoreline areas.

